

GIACOMO AND PALLIDINA; OR, THE ITALIAN
BEGGARS.

BY COUNTESS MARIE MONTEMERLI

II.

SO long a time passed without any tidings of my father, that the rest of the beggars began to murmur.

"Have you heard from Bastiano?" they would ask.

"No."

"Are you quite sure it was to Lucca he was going?"

"Yes, he told me so."

"He deceived thee, my child!"

"That's impossible."

"Did he leave his money and his clothes behind him?"

"He took some away with him, but he must have left some behind."

"You may bid good-bye to your father, Giacomo, and consider yourself an orphan, for you will never see him again."

Such speeches as these threw me into a state of consternation that forbade my making any reply, but Pallidina whispered in my ear:

"Don't cry, Momo, if he has been cruel enough to forsake you, you will still have the same Father as I, the one to whom we pray night and morning, the Father in heaven."

There was another disappearance, too, at this time, which gave rise to a great deal of talk among us. For several days Pietrina had not occupied her usual place at the door of the Duomo. It was supposed that she or her child must be ill, and at length Pallidina and I, who were really fond of her, went to see what was wrong. Her neighbours told us that one evening, when she had returned earlier than usual, they saw a man prowling about the yard, that the next morning her attic was found empty, and that no one knew where she was.

We carried back this fresh piece of news to Mother Teresa, who at once exclaimed that to a dead certainty Pietrina had gone off to join my father. This was an inexpressible shock to me.

"And I—what is to become of me?" I exclaimed.

"You! you must take your chance! That does not trouble them much. They have cast thee off."

"My father may, but Pietrina would never do such a thing," I replied, sobbing.

"Hold your tongue, Giacomo," said Tonino; "this has happened to many besides you—to me for one."

Pallidina, who was standing by my side, looked at me with an air of indignation:

"How can you cry like that? One might think you had lost everything on earth. Have you not got *me*? You see now that the holy angels did hear us, however, for since your father has left you, you will not have to go to Lucca, and we shall remain together."

I did what I could to seem cheerful, but with poor success.

"You are getting quite good for nothing," our companions would say; "you don't bring us in half that you used to do. The fact is, you have grown too big and you are too dull, you don't interest strangers, you only look like a great gawky vagabond."

As may be supposed, such remarks did not raise my spirits.

One evening on returning to go to bed I found the door shut. "My father must have come back!" thought I, and my heart beat so I could hardly breathe. I knocked gently—no answer. Then I knocked might and main, but still no answer. Terrified, I ran off to Teresa, who gave me a very ungracious reception.

"I can't get in," I said.

"And what brings you here? Do you suppose I'm going to take a good-for-nothing like you in?"

"Has my father returned, Teresa? Our door is shut."

"You must be a fool, my boy, to suppose that! Bastiano has not paid his rent; his landlord heard that he was gone, so he carried off the furniture and shut up the room; and quite right he was, too."

"Then I shall have no place to sleep in!"

"A great wonder that! there are plenty besides you who sleep in the streets."

Teresa's hardness prevented my shedding a tear.

"I am hungry," I said; "I have had no supper."

"There is bread for thee—and now go off in God's name, and don't harass me."

All that night I wandered through the streets of Pisa half frantic—I lay on the parapet of the bridge, and felt so desolate and miserable that once I was tempted to drown myself, when, raising my eyes to